critical digest

VOL. IV No. 20 January 14, 1952

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Fancy Meeting You Again-Royale, 1/14/52. Chandler Cowles and Ben Segal present new comedy by George S. Kaufman and Leueen MacGrath (Mrs. Kaufman). Play staged by husband, stars wife. Walter Matthau and Margaret Hamilton are featured...The Shrike -Cort, 1/15/52. Jose Ferrer presents new play by Joseph Kramm. Ferrer staged, cast co-stars Ferrer and Judith Evelyn...Desire Under the Elms-ANTA Playhouse, 1/15/52. First limited run production of ANTA play series under direction of Robert Whitehead, staged by Harold Clurman. O'Neill revival features Karl Malden, Carol Stone and Douglas Watson.

Digests of Current Reviews-more inside

Pal Joey-Broadhurst, 1/3/52. New Year opened with unanimous critical salute for Rodgers and Hart revival, presented by Styne, Key and Farrell. All daily critics lavished praise on all departments. Realistic musical which changed theatre trends hasn't dated, most noted. Music and score, plus book by John O'Hara remains perfect ten years later. Vivienne Segal in her original role is still perfect. Harold Lang won praise as singer, dancer and actor from all but two appraisers. Kerr, Herald-Tribune, and Sheaffer, Eagle, thought he was miscast in appearance for the role of the heel. Helen Gallagher, Helen Woods, Lionel Stander and many others were loudly applauded. Though Atkinson, Times, recalls he dissented on original production, he found the brilliant production staged by David Alexander and Robert Alton renews his confidence in the professionalism of the theatre. Chapman, News, billed it as fast, funny, tough and tuneful. Eagle critic also believes original production was staged with sharper bite, but present production is still a very enjoyable show. News man believes chorus is pretty enough to revive stage door johnnies.

Point of No Return-Alvin, 12/13/51. Three weekly critics panned Paul Osborn's adaptation of the Marquand novel, presented by Leland Hayward; while Brown, Saturday Review, okayed it as competent, professional job. The dissenters admitted that cast headed by Henry Fonda and Leora Dana, the direction by H.C.Potter, and the expensive sets and costumes were professional. But that is all they would admit. Likewise each pointed out that these elements will naturally attract many patrons. Marshall, Nation added that the production will give many feeling that they are seeing a serious play. She was bored and amused by turns. George Jean Nathan and Clurman, New Republic, panned lack of inventiveness in characterizations. Former believes super production even fooled critics into thinking they were in presence of something great. While latter believes show's chief charm lies in its shock of recognition on a simple middle class level. These "con" reviewers didn't believe Osborn got any of the bite or satire inherent in the original, while Brown praised Osborn for squeezing so much of the original tone and feeling into his narrative.

News & Notes

Shows that closed include Legend for Lovers and The Number...Kiss Me Kate popular price short run revival praised by daily critics, though all noted touring cast is no match for original...Tyrone Guthrie, British director, guest of January "Drama Desk" meeting...South Pacific Monday night curtains will rise at 7:00 for benefit of commuters...James Rennie to replace Howard Lindsay in Remains to be Seen...Student discount seats to Saint Joan may be obtained by showing proper credentials to George Ross, 152 West 42nd Street...National Theatre Assembly postponed until next December.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

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1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass
6. NY Post
7. NY Journal American
8. NY World Tele-Sun
9. Brooklyn Eagle
10. LI Press
11. Newark News
12. Chr. Science Monitor
13. Journal of Commerce
14. Morning Telegraph-WFDR
15. Ward Morehouse
16. George Jean Nathan
17. Wall Street Journal
18. Women's Wear
19. Billboard
20. Variety
21. Critical Digest
22. Theatre Arts
23. WCBS Leonard
24. Commonweal
25. Cue
26. Nation
27. New Leader-WEVD
28. New Republic
29. Newsweek
30. New Yorker
31. Park East
32. Saturday Review
33. Time

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50	Con: 1-6-9-11-12-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-25-28-29-32. None: 10-14-21-26. So-So: 31.
BAGELS AND YOX-9/12/51	Con: 1 thru 7-9-10-15-16-19-20-21-24-25-27-28. None: 12-13-14-17-18-22-23-26-29-30-31-32-33.
CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50	Con: 19-22-26-28. So-So: 3. None: 10-14-21-23.
THE CONSTANT WIFE-12/8/51	Con: 3-25-30. None: 11-13-14-15-17-18-19-21-22-26-28-31-32.
THE FOUR POSTER-10/24/51	Con: 2-6-15-16-24-27-30-33. None: 14-18-22-26-28-29-32.
GIGI-11/24/51	Con: 1-4-5-6-8-12-15-25-27-28-32-33. None@ 14-22-23-31.
GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50	Con: 26. None: 10-21.
I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51	Con: 3-5-7-12-27-28. None: 10-13-14-18-21-22-26-31.
THE KING AND I-3/29/51	Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-24.
LEGEND OF LOVERS-11/26/51	Con: 1-2-3-4-5-8-9-10-11. None: 12 thru 17-19 thru 33.
LO AND BEHOLD-12/12/51	Con: 1-2-4-5-7-9-12-18-20-23-24-25-27-29-33. None: 11-13 thru 17-21-22-26-28-31-32.
THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51	Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-26.
THE NUMBER-10/30/51	Con: 1-2-4-8-9-17-19-20-21-23-24-25. None: 10-11-12-16-22-26-27-28-31-32.
PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51	Con: 2-6-7-15-20-23-24. None: 14-18-22-27-28-31-32.
POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51	Con: 8-27-33. None: 7-11-13 thru 17-21-22-23-24-26-28-31-32.
REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/51	Con: 1-7-16-18-21-24-26-28-30-33. None: 12-13-17-22.
SAINT JOAN-10/4/51	Con: 2-4-6-15-23-24-32-33. None: 12-13-14-17-22-25.
SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49	Con: 33. So-So: 25. None: 5-9-10-11-21-24-26-27-28.
STALAG 17-5/8/51	Con: 4-25-26-27-30. None: 10-21-22. So-So: 3.
TOP BANANA-11/1/51	Con: 6-7-27. None: 12-16-22-26-28-31-32.
TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51	Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-22-27-28-32.

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' Green Room Department '

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DIETETIC TORTURE...On stage eating and drinking can only be unnecessary tortures for the conscientious critic, moans Coleman, Mirror. With early curtain and deadlines the critics rush through dinner, usually skipping coffee and dessert. Though producers tempt critics with demonstrations of fancy drinking onstage, they will call the editor if they detect a whiff of a drink on a practicing critic.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Critics' panning of Lace on Her Petticoat for being inconsequential was on the ridiculous side, complains Burr, Playbill, for the graceful, charming play did exactly what it set out to do...Chicago critics and theatregoers win respect of Watts, Post, for refusing to accept the NYC endorsement of Season in the Sun and The Happy Time...Gabriel, Cue, will be reelected to second term as NY Critic Circle's head, predicts Morehouse, WT&S.

UNIQUE SEASON...Theatrical history made in 1951 by several interesting firsts points out Jacob Weiser in Variety's 46th Anniversary Annual. These include first professional plays in a church and in a concert hall, first two character play to pay back investment in six weeks, first time in modern times that two outstanding stars played in repertory, and first hit in years with an all male cast.

COLUMN TIPS...Boom due in '52 because of block buying of tickets for corporation employes, hints Kilgallen...NYC theatre owners ready to fight proposed increase in city admission taxes.

AUDIENCE DIRECTION...Though he admits fashionable first nighters at smarter openings are somehow managing the feat of becoming increasingly unbearable, Watts, Post, isn't as dismayed as his colleagues by the broken aisle running at the final curtain. More important, he feels, is the problem of getting playgoers back into theatre after intermission.

WRITERS A-COMING...Major trouble with dull Broadway season is that the established playwrights aren't writing. Those that are working don't have anything in shape for production. But Morehouse, WT&S, expects a rush of new playwrights to alter the entire situation. The 1950s might well be another decade for the writers.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '

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Anna Christie- City Center 1/9/52. Unanimous, though mild, reviews filed by daily critics on NYC Theatre Company's second limited run production. O'Neill revival staged by Michael Gordon, with sets and costumes by Emiline Roche, was recommended by all. But more than half of the daily critics thought Celeste Holm's portrayal in the title role was poor. Kerr, Herald Tribune, summed up this viewpoint by commenting that she don't have the emotional weight to go along with the script. Others weren't as kind. Critics agreed that script wasn't O'Neill's best, but all agreed with Atkinson's thought that it is certainly better than anything written this season. Chapman, News, hopes that the production can be continued past the planned two week run. Most recalled that Pauline Lord's portrayal in the original production 31 years ago was perfect and impossible to match. Hawkins, WT&S, is astonished that script isn't produced more often. Pollock, Compass, wishes entire cast spoke louder and tried harder. Decision was split on Kevin McCarthy, though most praised him. Art Smith, Grace Valentine and others in the supporting cast shared plaudits. Though all critics recommended production as important to theatre students, Compass and Herald Tribune men thought current version could have been better.

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' Random Drama Notes '

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FILMS---Film version of Gigi playing at NY art houses...Top Banana producers flew west to consider offers...Twentieth Century Fox version of Faithfully Yours will be called "It's All In the Mind"...Spewacks to do script for Alexander Korda's Kiss Me Kate, to be filmed in England...Stanley Kramer to film The Four Poster...Warners to produce 1938 musical A Slight Case of Murder...Paramount considering Guys and Dolls for Bob Hope...Fox's production of The Number to star Richard Widmark...Paramount signed Robert Shawley and William Pierson, from original cast, for Stalag 17... Variety notes trend of using members of original Broadway casts in film versions spreading...Daniel Mann to direct Wallis-Paramount Come Back Little Sheba...Canada Lee to film Othello in Italy, with Robert Rossellini as co-producer.

BOOKS---Bantam issuing Christopher Isherwood's "The Berlin Stories" as "I Am A Camera"..."Show Biz" in fourth edition...James Mason compiling book of theatre criticisms of past 50 years, with his own comments on same...Dodd, Mead seeking Shaw letters...Knopf to publish collection of George Jean Nathan's reviews entitled "The World of George Jean Nathan"...Deems Taylor working on biography of Rodgers and Hammerstein...Add to rave reviews for "Show Biz" praise of Burr, Playbill, and Coleman, Mirror...Sixth Avenue Delicatessen in NYC selling "Show Biz."

RECORDS---Conversation Piece, Noel Coward's musical of 1930, released by Columbia with Coward, Cathleen Nesbitt, Ethel Griffies...Pal Joey original cast album to be cut by Capitol...Don Juan in Hell with First Drama Quartette to be produced by Columbia using live audience in studio...Princeton University Triangle Club LP disc of Never Say Horses sold in theatres where musical presented...Harvard University Hasty Pudding Club recording of Seeing Red to be sold commercially...Jose Ferrer's recordings of Shakespeare classics, "Voices from Shakespeare" to be piped into NYC schools...Best album of year was Guys and Dolls, picks Watt, News...Kauffmann, SRL, recommends Decca albums of The Lady's Not For Burning, but pans Decca excerpts from Shakespeare.

TV & RADIO---Charles Laughton Christmas Eve readings won unanimous praise from TV critics, he is being considered for Tuesday night TV show and for regular radio series next fall...WNEW played recorded excerpts from Cleopatras...WYNC and WFDR-FM played BBC World Theatre's King Lear...WNEW to launch program of readings with Melvyn Douglas, Dane Clark and Boris Karloff, program to be heard Sunday nights... John Rosenfield, Dallas News, was commentator on network programs of Dallas Symphony ...Ethel Colby Colby, Journal of Commerce, announcer on WJZ TV "Solo Drama"...Emily Kimbrough signed for TV and/or radio series of commentary, anecdotes and criticism... Top Banana producer Paula Stone broadcasts on WMGM three times a week at noon...Is Tallulah Bankhead going to quit radio for a Broadway revue next year, asks O'Brian, Journal America...Laurence Olivier and Ralph Richardson should do more TV, suggests Shalit, News...St.Joan, Peter Pan and A Tree Grows in Brooklyn available for TV at $65,000 each for one shot theatre or home telecasts.

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' Legit Stuff '

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Shows that closed include Glad Tidings and Nina...Leland Hayward has formed a "Broadway for Eisenhower" committee...Vivien Leigh missed two performances of Caesar and Cleopatra, last week, Mairhi Russell subbed...Equity Library Community Theatre project opens third season with four productions scheduled in Bronx and Queens...New Dramatists Committee received $2,000 donation from John Golden...Former Judge Simon will arbitrate producers and press agents dispute...Robert W. Dowling named to Council of Living Theatre Board...Dutch rights to Stalag 17 sold.